

UK Chief Medical Officers issue advice for health professionals on physical exercise during pregnancy

The new recommendations aim to reduce issues such as obesity, diabetes and other health concerns during pregnancy. The latest evidence suggests pregnant women should carry out around 150 minutes of 'moderate intensity' activity every week.

This is described as 'activity that makes you breathe faster' while still being able to hold a conversation.

This new advice is being issued in the form of an infographic, aimed at providing midwives, nurses, GPs, obstetricians, gynaecologists, as well as the leisure sector, with the latest evidence on physical activity during pregnancy.

Chief Medical Officer for Wales, Dr Frank Atherton, said:

"There is strong evidence that shows that regular, moderate exercise during pregnancy can offer women significant benefits. This includes reducing high blood pressure problems, helping to control weight gain, improving sleep, reducing the risk of diabetes, and improving mood. That's why we want to ensure pregnant women, and the health professionals who support them, are aware of the benefits of physical activity throughout pregnancy.

"Pregnant women who are not currently active, should build up their activity levels slowly, while women who already take part in regular exercise should stay active but listen to their body and adapt their exercise regime if necessary. A general rule for all pregnant women is, if it feels pleasant, keep going; if it is uncomfortable, then stop and seek advice."

Women who have not been active before pregnancy are recommended to follow a gradual progression of exercise—beginning with 10 minute bouts of moderate intensity exercise, gradually building up to 150 minutes. The activity should be spread throughout the week, and it is important to remember that 'every activity counts'.

The new advice was constructed by the CMO Expert Committee for Physical Activity and Pregnancy, which included midwives, obstetricians, exercise physiologist, GPs, Public Health Consultants, Sports Medicine, exercise professionals, nursing and research scientists. The project was led by Professor Marian Knight and Dr Charlie Foster from the University of Oxford. The aim was to produce evidence-based messaging for health professionals to use with the public. The infographic was developed and tested with panels of

health professionals and pregnant women before consultation with more than 250 UK based doctors and midwives.

Health professionals are encouraged to use this infographic to discuss the benefits of physical activity with all pregnant women, to help them maintain a healthy lifestyle, with approximately 1 in 20 women being recorded as obese during pregnancy.

The key points are:

- Pregnant women who are already active should be encouraged to maintain their physical activity levels
- Women may need to adapt their activity throughout their pregnancy. For example, replacing contact sports with a non-contact sport or an appropriate exercise class
- Importantly, the evidence supporting this infographic found no evidence of harm for maternal or infant resulting from moderate intensity physical activity
- Those who were not active before their pregnancy are advised to avoid intense exercise, such as running, jogging, racquet sports, and strenuous strength training. But some activities can be adapted
- The final safety message is a common sense 'don't bump the bump', referring to all activities which place pregnant women at an increased risk of injury through physical contact
- The study recommends pregnant women avoid activities where there is an increased risk of falling, trauma or high impact injuries. These include skiing, water skiing, surfing, off-road cycling, gymnastics, horse riding and contact sports such as ice hockey, boxing, football or basketball. They are also discouraged from exercise that requires lying flat on their back after the first trimester
- If you experience breathlessness before or following minimal exertion, headaches, dizziness, chest pain, muscle weakness affecting balance and calf pain or swelling, seek medical advice. Women may also be advised to reduce/stop physical activity following pregnancy complications such as vaginal bleeding, regular painful contractions or amniotic fluid leakage.